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THE BRITISH COUNCIL CONFERENCE IN 1962 MET TO CONSIDER THE DOUBTS AND DISSATISFACTION ABOUT THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE OVERSEAS, ESPECIALLY IN COUNTRIES WHICH USE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE. THE FIRST THREE COMMISSIONS STUDIED RESPECTIVELY ENGLISH LITERATURE IN UNIVERSITIES OVERSEAS, ENGLISH LITERATURE IN ADULT EDUCATION, AND ENGLISH LITERATURE IN SCHOOLS AND IN THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH. THE REMAINING FOUR COMMISSIONS, UNDER THE TOPIC TEACHING AIDS, STUDIED PROVISION OF TEXTS, PERIODICALS, BROADCASTING AND RECORDINGS, AND VISUAL MEDIA. THE PARTICIPANTS CONCLUDED THAT ENGLISH LITERATURE NEEDS SOME MODERNIZATION IF IT IS TO SURVIVE OVERSEAS, ESPECIALLY IN AFRICA AND ASIA. THIS MODERNIZATION MIGHT INCLUDE GREATER USE OF VISUAL AIDS, GREATER RELIANCE ON THE DISCOVERIES OF LINGUISTICS, A BROADER VIEW OF LITERATURE, AND GREATER FUNCTIONAL RELATION OF ENGLISH LITERATURE TO THE LIFE AND CAREER OF THE OVERSEAS STUDENT. THERE WAS A RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR ALSO STUDYING AMERICAN LITERATURE. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "PMLA," VOLUME 78, NUMBER 4, PART 2, SEPTEMBER 1963, PAGES 26-29. (BN)

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THE BRITISH Council Conference on the teaching of English Literature overseas was held at King's College, Cambridge, England, 16–18 July 1962. As K. R. Johnstone, Deputy Director-General of the British Council, pointed out, this was the first conference on teaching English Literature overseas, though such teaching has been in progress for over a century. More than seventy-five participants came from twenty-five different countries, and had taught in many more. The discussions of the conference were taped and will be published in a 60,000 word book by the firm of Methuen.

The initial impetus for the Conference came from a feeling expressed most strongly by members of the British Council, that English literature teaching overseas, if continued in its present old-fashioned form, might vanish from many overseas programs. In his report on the study of English Literature in Afro-Asian countries, John Holloway expressed forcibly the need for a new vitality in literature studies comparable to that in recent linguistic studies.

The Conference met in plenary sessions at its beginning and end (16 July and 18 July). The first three Commissions, which met on 16 and 17 July, studied respectively (1) English Literature in Universities Overseas, (2) English Literature in Adult Education, and (3) English Literature in Schools (and in the Training of Teachers of English). The announced topics for all three Commissions were examinations, syllabuses, and techniques of English Literature teaching, but the actual debates ranged very widely at times.

The remaining four Commissions met once on 17 July and had as their general topic that of Teaching Aids; these Commissions studied (4) Provision of Texts, (5) Periodicals, (6) Broadcasting and Recordings, and (7) Visual Media.

The crucial issue was strongly raised at the initial plenary session: that there were widespread doubts and dissatisfaction concerning the teaching of English Literature overseas, especially in countries which used English as a Second Language (as a Lingua Franca, or as what is sometimes termed a Language of Wider Communication). It was quickly conceded that in Europe the problem is "mainly linguistic." But elsewhere English Literature, so it was argued, may, like Latin literature before it, vanish as a significant civilizing force.

Some special problems received repeated attention. In Indian high schools the official requirement is 250 English structures and 2500 words, but with this equipment Indian students are unable to read such standard literary works as those of Shakespeare, Lamb, Shelley, or Keats. The situation in Africa was described as far worse. Participants in the Conference agreed that English Honors Degree Candidates are very good, but they also agreed that very few such candidates were being produced overseas. All the participants described overseas literary research as very poor. One speaker noted that the General Certificate in English Literature has the poorest predictive value of all the Certificates; nor, strangely enough, does it always have a close correlation with any marks for purely linguistic ability.

Some of the difficulty in teaching English Literature overseas has arisen from the rapid expansion of education, coupled with a decrease in the number of expatriate teachers of English because of poor job security, low pay, poor prospects in England on return home, and lack of permanent career posts overseas. Obvious remedies, all costly, came up for discussion; the sense of the meeting was that, ideally, overseas teaching should be a career in its own right.

Some useful distinctions arose in plenary sessions and in the several Commissions. (1) Developing nations in the process of achieving modern levels of industrialism and commerce, with long cultural histories (Bengal, Iran) need English literature in the broadest sense for help in understanding life in modern society. (2) Emerging nations, those dependent on present and future developments not only for economic but for cultural viability, need access to the whole history of a major culture such as English, especially through its literature. (3) Established nations (as in Europe) where English is studied as a foreign culture, with much of the teaching done not in English but in the local language, require what are essentially comparative literature studies.

The very great diversity of teaching conditions made it necessary for the participants in the Con-

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ference to remind themselves of these groupings again and again. In fact delegates from time to time expressed a feeling of helplessness because of the differences in their situations. For example, even among the teachers from Africa, a sharp distinction had to be made between West Africa and the Sudan. The Conference was most strongly and vocally represented from Africa (including Egypt) and India, somewhat underrepresented from Southeast Asia and the Far East, and very much underrepresented, strangely enough, when it came to the problems of teaching English literature in Europe.

One issue arose several times in various forms. Should more modern works of literature be taught overseas? By modern was meant apparently novels and poetry from 1800 to 1935, and one or two plays after 1946. One speaker suggested that modern literature should be taught first to non-specialists, but last to specialists in English Literature. One speaker cautioned against an unhistorical use of modern (or past) literature purely for moral edification; this speaker warned that Shakespeare in India had turned into some sort of Indian guru.

The question of modern literature led to the question of modern American literature. A British Council survey recently carried out in Senior Secondary Schools in Uganda had revealed that these schools were against the use of modern American writers in any examination syllabus. Most of the participants in the Conference, however, including teachers from Africa, were in favor of the use of modern American literature in the examination syllabus. When the participants were advised that American professors had requested USIA to provide English literature classics as well as American books in USIS libraries, it was agreed to ask the British Council, within its limited budget, to make a similar effort. Delegates stressed the need overseas for books about local conditions, and the need for English novels and translations with local settings. Debate went on as to whether second-rate literature, such as detective stories, should be used. Contemporary literary criticism was rejected as completely unsuitable, but, somewhat inconsistently perhaps, there was much approval of I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism.* There was no agreement as to whether a larger or smaller quantity of literature should be read and tested than at present.

Because of pressure from overseas students of English, many of whom at the university level are writers or would-be writers, there was much interest in the American type of creative writing course. Conference members noted that they had no satisfactory way of dealing with ambitious writers in their classes, aside from some amateur theatricals, translations, and courses in reading modern literature.

The dominant definition of literature at the Conference was that first expressed in the British Government Resolution of 1835 (which perhaps originated with Macaulay), of "imparting to the native population a knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of the English language." English literature in this context, as several delegates pointed out, would inevitably include philosophy, law, history, and poetry, and literary study would consist of describing a culture in English. But the talk at the Conference and the available samples of curriculums suggested that English overseas practice puts much stress on learning poetry, on interpretation of texts, and on literary style. There was no evidence of anything like an American Studies or American Civilization approach to literature. One Indian speaker was strongly against using literature for sociological and anthropological purposes (he favored instead studies in comparative literature of an elementary kind). Another Indian spoke strongly in favor of the "pure literature" approach. (A debate between these Indian teachers and those now being trained in the U. S. in American Studies might be a very exhilarating event.)

In the Visual Aids Commission, at which I spoke on the uses of the Carnegie Color Slide Collection, *The Arts of the United States*, it was agreed that much could be done along similar lines to use color slides to supplement the teaching of English literature. This Commission stressed the growing use of 8 mm. films in education.

Though the Conference as a whole centered on literature, a number of items of linguistic interest came up. There was general agreement that the teacher of English literature overseas should learn one of the local languages. The problem of Ghana was noted, however; there the poor instructor would have to choose from among eight languages and thirty-six dialects. Nigeria and West Africa, it was noted, present even greater hazards to the practitioner of linguistic good will. There was also agreement that an instructor overseas should know "phonetics." But a European lecturer stated flatly that European universities, at least, preferred to have their own nationals teach phonetics, and did not want any foreign interference in this part of the curriculum.

The University Commission, and several other Commissions, mentioned problems of teaching

prosody (a subject which hardly ever comes up during discussions of teaching American literature overseas). The subject of prosody played an important part in British overseas examinations and syllabuses. The delegates expressed interest in the new linguistic approach to prosody now developing in America (as represented in such inexpensive and useful texts as George Hemphill's edition of *Discussions of Poetry: Rhythm and Sound* [Boston, 1961]).

Several speakers, without using the technical word, were obviously drilling their students in intonation patterns in order to encourage the appreciation of literary readings from such writers as D. H. Lawrence and Jane Austen; they were unfamiliar with the work of Kenneth Pike and others on intonation. There was no discussion of programmed instruction (so-called machine teaching), or of its possible uses in solving linguistic and literary teaching problems.

Though there was a substantial textbook exhibit, it was surprising to find how few texts of English literature, classic or modern, are available in a form suitable for overseas students. None were listed which contain systematic (and modern) linguistic analysis or aid. The need was pointed up at the Conference by frequent references to the miserable failure of an unedited text of *Moby Dick* as an examination book. The striking lack of success of *Moby Dick* was mentioned a number of times with obvious relish while all eyes harpooned the lone American participant. The even more disastrous failure of Sir Walter Scott in both poetry and prose resulted in no such glances towards the Scottish participant.

I. A. Richards made the point that one can't separate literature from language; that literature is only a way of doing a good job with the language, and one can do a good job with a very small vocabulary. Whether Basic English is actually a small vocabulary, or a disguised form of a large vocabulary, was not discussed. Only two speakers from the floor made any specific case for the relevance of modern general linguistics to the study of literature; one speaker argued that linguistics could now handle literary texts, but gave no specific examples.

A crucial difficulty of work in literature was said to be the fact that people may be linguistically immature, but emotionally mature. It was felt that literary readings supply a desirable and indeed essential "contextualization" of language.

One of the most provocative arguments arose from a debate about the need to teach Hindi literature in India, rather than English literature. Both Hindi specialists and Egyptian specialists conceded that gaps in local language literary training made it desirable to teach English literature in these two instances (for example, one could hardly learn about the concept of genres in literature by studying Egyptian literature alone). But a vigorous young African resisted the notion that African cultures have literatures which are insufficient in scope for serious study, and he made the telling point that African literature exists but is primarily oral. The counter-argument was that if oral African literature is so good, why do Africans demand the study of English literature in their schools? Both sides seemed unaware of the steady shift towards oral and electronic (sometimes called non-typographical) literature in the last thirty years, a shift which is accelerating in both American and English literature; ironically enough, the very proceedings of the Council Conference were being preserved as we talked by electronic means, and would be essentially oral literature even in their final book form.

The effect of the various overseas examinations, especially the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate, had been expected by the planners of the Conference to be one of the main topics of debate, but this subject received nowhere near its allotted time. Perhaps the reason was that the Overseas School Certificate reflects very quickly the desires of the teachers themselves. Some members of the Conference (not teachers themselves) interpreted this teacherly influence as conservative and bad.

Participants in the Conference welcomed materials sent by the Washington Center for Applied Linguistics, especially the bibliographical listings, discussions of exams, and descriptions of linguistic films. Several Commissions were interested in the results of American experiments on improving the reading speed of overseas students. American methods of graduate training were praised, and it was agreed that foreign students, whenever this could be afforded, should spend one year of general study in England before beginning more specialized research.

To conclude, the Conference must have left the participants with a clear sense of the requirement that English literature, as a useful subject, needs some modernization if it is to survive overseas, especially in Africa and Asia. This modernization might include greater use of visual aids, greater reliance on the discoveries of linguistics (some participants suggested an international conference on the relationship of linguistics to the advanced study of literature), a broader view of literature which might be comparable to our

American Civilization concept, and greater functional relation of English literature to the life and career of the overseas student.

In the modern period there was fairly complete recognition of the need for studying American literature along with English literature. A major development during the Conference was the acknowledgment that English literature had to mean all "literature in English"—that is, American literature and other overseas literature, as well as that of the British Isles.

Of the more general remarks made at the Conference, especially significant was that of Professor V. Gokak of India, who saw English Literature as helping to modernize Asian literature, and helping also to bring about the understanding and trust that should exist between peoples and cultures. G. Bullough, Chairman of the Conference, thoughtfully stressed in his remarks on teaching English Literature overseas, the interchanging and strengthening of values which occur on both sides when such teaching is at its best.

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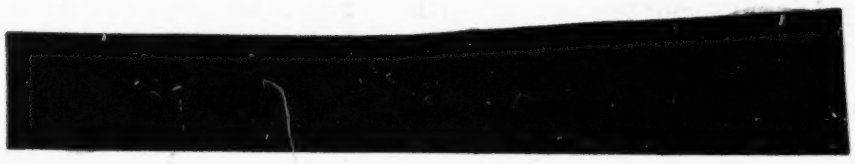

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